



Definitions in Physical Activity

What is physical fitness?

Physical fitness is a term that is often used but may be hard to describe when you are pressed for a definition. With that being the case, how do you know if you are improving your physical fitness?

Generally speaking, physical fitness refers to the ability to carry out daily tasks with alertness and vigor, without undue fatigue, and having enough energy to enjoy leisure-time pursuits and respond to emergencies. There are several components of physical fitness to consider that are related to cardiorespiratory fitness. These physical fitness components can be considered either **health-** or **skill-**related.

Health-related components:

Body composition, flexibility, muscular fitness, cardiorespiratory fitness

Skill-related components:

Ability to move quickly and easily (agility, balance, coordination, speed, reaction time, ability to move with speed and force (power)

The terms physical activity, exercise, sedentary behavior, and physical inactivity are often used to describe the type or amount of movement a person does. To provide clarity among these terms, here are some helpful definitions:

Term	Definition	Example
Physical Fitness	The ability to carry out daily tasks with alertness and vigor, without undue fatigue, and having enough energy to enjoy leisure-time pursuits and respond to emergencies	Getting up from a chair, walking to the mailbox
Physical Activity	Any bodily movement produced by skeletal muscles that requires energy expenditure	Cleaning, cooking, leisurely walks
Exercise	A subcategory of physical activity that is structured, planned, repetitive, and purposeful in that it is performed with the intention of maintaining or improving physical fitness	Exercise classes, weightlifting, swimming, playing sports
Sedentary Behavior	Any waking behavior that requires low energy expenditure	Sitting, lying, reclining, desk-based office work, driving, and watching television
Physical Inactivity	Not meeting physical activity recommendations	Not completing at least 150 minutes per week of moderate-intensity aerobic activity or at least 75 minutes per week of vigorous-intensity aerobic activity

Definitions of Physical Activity (continued)

Exercise vs. Physical Activity

To clarify the difference between exercise and physical activity, all exercise would be considered physical activity, but not all physical activity is considered exercise.

For example, if someone is doing yard work for the purpose of cleaning up their yard, that is physical activity; since it is not a planned and structured activity with the intention of improving fitness, it would not be considered exercise.

And, to simplify the difference between sedentary behavior and physical inactivity, you can think of sedentary behavior as sitting too much and physical inactivity as performing too little exercise or physical activity.

The previous terms are also related to various levels of physical activity, which can be described as highly active, active, insufficiently active, and inactive:



Term	Definition
Highly active	Exceeding the target physical-activity range for adults (more than 300 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity per week)
Active	Meeting the physical activity guidelines (150–300 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity per week)
Insufficiently active	Doing some physical activity but not enough to meet recommended guidelines for adults (less than 150 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity per week)
Inactive	Not doing any physical activity beyond basic moving from daily life



Being active refers to meeting the [Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans](#), being highly active means exceeding the physical activity guidelines, while being insufficiently active refers to doing some physical activity but not enough to meet established guidelines, and inactive means not currently doing any physical activity beyond activities of daily living.